

ONWARD

BY

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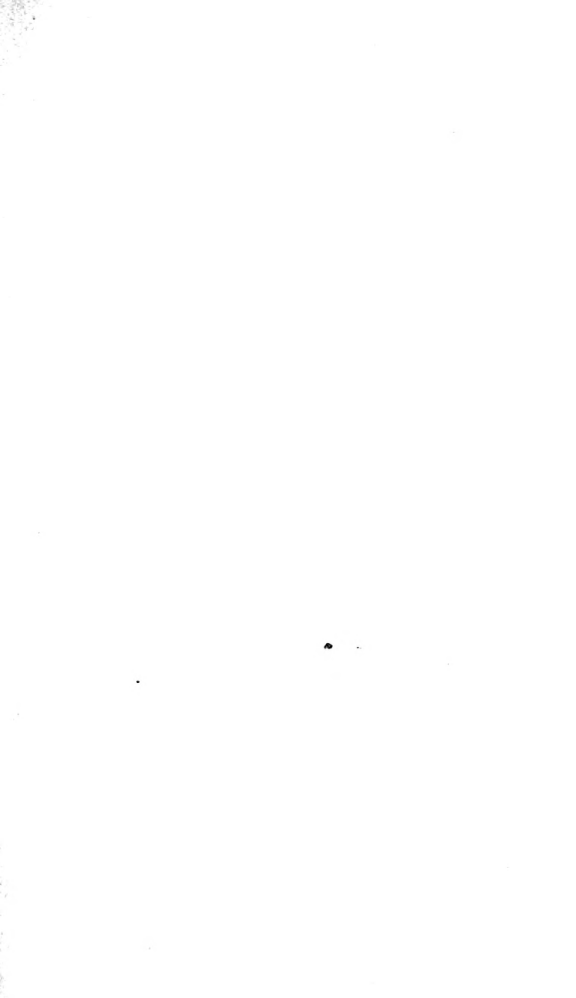
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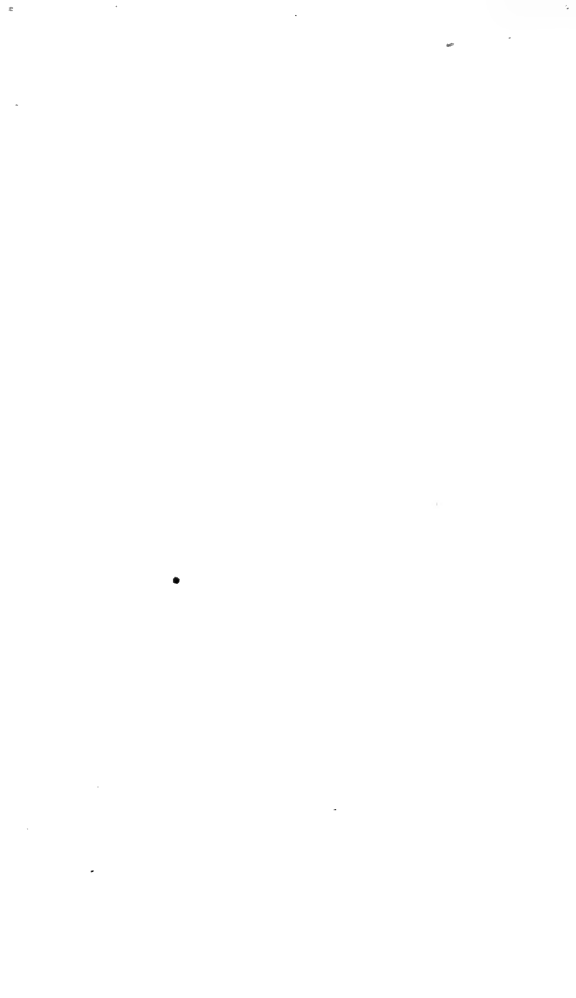
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CHRISTIAN PROGRESSION.

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GREGORY T. BEDELL, D. D.

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THIS little work was prepared for the publisher by the lamented author, a little before his departure from the world. It is now printed as found among his papers arranged for this purpose. It is presumed that none can read it now, but with increased interest, and it is presented to the public in the hope that it will be made, by God's Holy Spirit, an instrument of good.

Philadelphia, June, 1836.

ONWARD;
OR
CHRISTIAN PROGRESSION.

“SPEAK TO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL THAT THEY
GO FORWARD.”—Exodus xiv. 15.

THERE are few, if any, among the readers of this little book, who are ignorant of that portion of the history of the children of Israel to which the passage I have placed at the head of this little work particularly belongs. On the occasion to which it refers, their emergency was great,—their situation one of extraordinary difficulty. They had come out

from the “land of Egypt and the house of bondage;” and God had led them into a situation from which they as well as their enemies, supposed there was no escape. In their rear, they had the Egyptian army in the hot pursuit, led on by their king in person, infuriated as he was by having lost their profitable services, and panting for revenge in consequence of having been so often baffled. In their front was the Red Sea, to try which would have been madness, as they might naturally have supposed. In this disastrous position of their affairs, in which there appeared no alternative between the fearful choice of perishing in the waves, and of being carried back into an ignominious and cruel slavery, they cried, though not with child-like confidence, unto the Lord, and superadded murmuring against their leader and benefactor, Moses. They seem soon to have forgotten the hand which had been

outstretched, mighty for their deliverance thus far ; and strange as it may be, they seem even to have distrusted that power whose presence had all along been visible, in the guiding pillar of the cloud and fire which went before the camp. But shut up as they were by the land, with their foes in the rear, and apparent inevitable death in front, with what astonishment must they have received the singular command thus given by God to Moses, “ Speak to the children of Israel, that they go forward.”

“ Go forward”—What! madly rush to death amidst the waves of the sea?—Suffer me here to interpose a remark, which I look upon as containing one of the most important positions relative to the matter of religion—a command from God, can never *in its own nature be impracticable*;—such a command seems in some way connected with a promise on the part of God ; and it is this which

makes the way of duty not only peremptory, but on the whole practicable and easy.— Could the Israelites suppose, that God had commanded them to go forward, and perish? No! They received the order and they obeyed it, and the power of God appeared greatly in their behalf. They went forward, and the sea, obedient to the command of God, stood as a “wall unto them on the right hand, and on the left.” The chosen people passed over “dry shod through the midst of the sea.” Their enemies pursued, but at the same command of God, the “sea came into its place again,” when the order which for a while had suspended the operation of the usual laws of nature was recalled; and the Egyptians perished in the mighty waters—the greatest deliverance on the one hand, and the greatest overthrow on the other, which stand on the records of history.

Now I have not introduced these facts to your attention for the purpose of entering into any remarks, relating particularly to the Israelitish history. Taken as a mere insulated direction, the command contains matter of most important instruction, and is every way adapted to the purposes of most valuable practical remarks. It is a direction suited in a very special manner to the condition of all professing Christians ; and is meant to be applied with a peculiar emphasis to any who have recently taken on themselves a public profession of the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this view of the subject it will be my purpose to consider the words of the text at the head of this little book.

I. As implying a setting out in the way of religion.

II. As opposed to standing still in religion.

III. As opposed to a retrograde movement.

IV. As demanding advancement.

These are the points to which, in this little work, the attention of my readers will be directed.

I. Then the words before us imply that you have actually set out in the way of religion.

If the Israelites had continued in the land of Egypt, this command would never have been given. It only became proper, as they had actually left the land of their captivity. If they had been disposed to remain in their bondage, the only language which would have been appropriate is such as this—"Up—get you out of this land." So in reference to ourselves, a command of this kind

implies, that we have entered upon the march of religion. It is inappropriate to those who are in a state of carelessness and unconcern : and the only language which is suitable to them is such as fell from the angel's lips when commissioned to destroy the cities of the plain, he said to Lot, "Escape for thy life, look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain, lest thou be consumed." I limit the exhortation then to those who may be said to have actually set out in the way of religion ; and to these the Lord says—"Speak, that they go forward." But how are we to ascertain these, and how are we to describe and point them out ? and how are any to know whether they are particularly addressed ? This is a point of delicate determination ; but as we are commanded in the Scriptures not to despise the day of small things, I wish to bring this matter down so as to make it embrace as large a

number as may be consistent with Gospel faithfulness. I do not think that the individual who has merely some occasional and momentary thought on the subject of religion can be said to have set out from the land of his captivity; for I suppose that there are very few, even of the most careless and unconcerned, who do not sometimes think on the subject. Through many an one's imagination it flits, just as the shadow of a cloud skims rapidly over the earth and leaves not a trace behind; and though many clouds, chasing each other through the vault of heaven when the sun is high, may cause their shadows to pass as swiftly before us, yet none of them singly, nor do all of them combined, leave any permanent impression. You cannot tell, search you how much you please—you cannot tell where they have been. So vague thoughts pass through the mind on the subject of religion.—

All mere occasional thoughts have proved as the early cloud and the morning dew which pass speedily away. The very least of the circumstances which may be allowed to indicate that an individual has even turned his attention to religion, is—that he or she has been induced to think most seriously on the dismal nature of their alienation from God by sin, to search with an awakened interest the pages of God's book for the means and methods of deliverance, and is constrained to pray earnestly and perseveringly that the chains of this wretched captivity may be broken. If persons come short of these preliminary requirements, I believe that they are not to be considered as having taken even one step in the way of religion. They are yet in the very land of Egypt, and they cannot with any reasonable propriety be exhorted to go forward, on the plain and melancholy principle, that they have not yet set

out at all. I have looked at this subject again and again, fearful lest I should by any means be mistaken, and after a very full and prudent examination, I am fully persuaded that only those who have been led by the Spirit of God, so seriously to think on the subject of religion, as to feel their own sinfulness and condemnation, their need of a Saviour and his sanctifying grace, and who have boldly determined that let others pursue what course they please, as for them they will serve the Lord, forsake sin, and live unto holiness; it is only these who in the very lowest sense of the expression may be said to have left the land of Egypt, to try the dangers and the difficulties of the wilderness on their onward way to Canaan; and of consequence, to none short of such are we authorized to consider the exhortation—"Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward;" for progression in religion

were impossible until its first step be taken. Are there any of my readers then, who can really and conscientiously believe that religion is becoming a matter of exceeding great and overpowering interest? Do any of them begin to think that the salvation of their souls is of supreme importance, and are they pushing on the vital investigation of the Gospel, "What shall we do to be saved?"—Have they any profitable conception of their sinfulness, and of the alienation of their hearts from God? Do they begin to take delight in searching the word of God? Do they feel that they are absolutely constrained to prayer for pardon, for grace, and for salvation? Have they experienced sorrow for sin and a genuine repentance? Have they felt the need of a Saviour, and are they resting upon him by faith? Do they desire to have their souls in all their powers and faculties entirely conformed to God? If they

do—and I desire them to be honest and faithful in this thing—if they do, there is with certainty a step taken in the way to Canaan, and the Lord speaks to them individually, and says—“Go forward.”

But this subject suffers a remarkable adaptation to the interesting circumstances of those who have lately, in the sight of a heart-searching God, and in the presence of his Church, taken upon themselves the solemn obligations of the baptismal covenant, or those who have reiterated the same in the rite of confirmation, or those who have sought to seal all their vows by an humble participation of the symbols of the broken body and blood of their Master and only Saviour, Jesus Christ. By these acts, open and public to the observation of men on earth, and angels in heaven, all such have professed to enter into the way of religion, and to leave the land and the slavery of Egypt. I can-

not, neither would I were I able, judge the motives by which any have been actuated. I have taken it for granted, all beyond is a matter for God to know, and for him and themselves to determine; I have taken it for granted that they have looked at this thing with understanding hearts and enlightened consciences. If they have, these things constitute their attestation, in the sight of God and men, that they have deliberately chosen the path of devotion to the love and service of their Saviour. These steps in their religious course are taken. It remains but that they give heed to the exhortation before us—"Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward."

But those who have lately made a profession of religion, embrace but a small number of those whom I would fain consider as having left the land of Egypt and the house of bondage. There are among my readers,

many who have been long professors of religion ; and while I have neither the courage nor the faith to believe that all such are spiritual in heart, and holy in conversation, and consistent in life ; a profession of religion is the only outward criterion by which we are to form our judgment. It is truly a melancholy declaration, that all are not Israel who are of Israel ; and that we may be loud in the declaration—" 'The temple of the Lord—the temple of the Lord—the temple of the Lord are these,'" and yet have no part or lot in the matter, because our hearts are not right in the sight of God. But to the eye of mortal there is no visible line of demarkation but that which is drawn to separate between those who do, and those who do not make an open profession of religion. In these remarks, then, I conclude in my position all who have outwardly professed religion ; and I will in the progress of my ad-

dress to them, give some marks by which we may form a judgment of their spiritual condition, while I also repeat to them the exhortation of the Lord by the mouth of his servant Moses—"Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward.

Having thus sought to settle the preliminary question, I am at liberty to take up my

IId. division, and to declare that these words are opposed to standing still in religion.

Unfortunately for our religious progression, the conscience is by far too easily satisfied; and many an individual having advanced a certain small distance, seems contented with that advancement, and disposed to stop short in the course. This is nearly as bad a situation, and will eventually, if not urged onward, prove as ruinous a situation as not to have set out. The Israelites had left Egypt,

and they had reached the borders of the Red Sea. But suppose that the camp had there become stationary ; suppose they had refused to move onward, and obstinately determined to stay where they then were, is it reasonable to suppose that the Lord would have interposed between them and their enemies ? No. The Egyptian army would unquestionably have overtaken them, and the consequence would have been either their return to captivity, or their total destruction on the spot where they halted. So in the matter of personal religion. If we are the least disposed to stop in our religious course, we shall be overtaken by the enemy, for in no part of the Christian life are his steps far behind us. And if we either think that we have gone far enough, or if we grow tired, and careless, and indifferent, and lukewarm, he will assuredly overtake us, and lead us back into the captivity from which for a few

moments we had vainly imagined that we had escaped. Then will the chains of our slavery be tenfold more difficult to break, and our bondage infinitely more hopeless. There must, there can be no standing still in religion; it is, by the necessity of the case, progressive or retrograde.

In relation to all those who have so lately taken upon themselves, both in confirmation and the Lord's supper, the solemn obligations of a covenant with God, I have assumed it as a principle that they have actually set out in the path of religion. I tell them, and I tell at the same time every professing Christian who has any part or lot in the matter, that for you there is now no stopping place this side eternity. You must press forward, or you have lost all your previous pains, and will lose your souls. The message which I bear from God to your souls is—no halting; one lingering step is akin

to ruin—"Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward."

III. Indissolubly connected with the last idea, I remark, that the command of the text is opposed to a retrograde movement.

It is declared in Scripture, and it is confirmed by our experience, that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; and on no subject is this self-deception practised more ruinously than on the great and paramount subject of religion. Many begin to raise a superstructure before the foundation is well laid; and consequently, they need not wonder why the building totters and falls. This is nothing more than might have been anticipated. Many persons, carried away by the mere impulse of awakened sensibility, are really disposed to think that they have taken a decided stand on the Lord's side; and under this impulse,

especially if it is strong, and in persons of ardent temperament, they may run, to all appearance, well for a season. But defection sooner or later comes, and destroys all the favourable opinions which others had entertained. Their religion, if it may be called so with any thing like propriety, is compared by our Saviour to seed sown on rocky places, where the ground was light and the soil had no depth; and as the roots could not strike deep, as soon as the sun was up, and poured down some of the fierceness of his beams, the goodly-appearing plant withered away, because it had no deepness of earth. There are many who are not careful enough in seeing that the foundation be well laid—there are many who do not count the cost of the undertaking, and so, when difficulties approach, when temptations or persecutions arise for the word's sake, presently they are offended, and turn back. There were many

who for a time followed our Saviour in the days of his flesh ; but in consequence of a plain, and doctrinal, and spiritual discourse which he delivered, pointing out some matters which they had not duly considered, it is said, from that time many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him. It is against a disposition to draw off from the service of God, that I would direct the strong language of the text ; and I desire to be considered as speaking to every individual who has ever, in any way, or among any denomination of Christians, made a profession of religion. Let me warn you of the awful danger of defection, or backsliding. The particular portion of the Israelitish history which is before us, as well as the whole tenor of the Gospel, shows the tremendous predicament of danger in which that individual is placed, who goes back from the love and the service of God. Just carry back your ima-

ginations to that period which this history contemplates. What would have been the consequence to the Israelites, had they turned back? You will remember, that they had on their right hand and on their left an untracked desert and impassable mountains—they had the Red Sea in the front, it is true, appalling enough; but they had in the rear their implacable enemies, thirsting for their blood, and panting for vengeance. Had they gone back, they would have thrown themselves on the very spears of the Egyptians, or with a most dastardly spirit, have invited those chains of slavery, the links of which they had once been enabled violently to burst asunder. Now the case of real Christians is similar. They have obstacles in front, and they have mountains of difficulty on either side. I shall speak of these at large in my succeeding remarks. But though they have these, they have the enemy be-

hind ; and if they will go back, all that they accomplish is, that they throw themselves into his arms, and, as heretofore, will be led away captive at his will. 'They gain nothing by their defection from God, but the certainty of earthly slavery to sin, and ruin to their souls in the world to come ; for thus saith the Lord—" Whosoever putteth his hand to the plough, and looketh back, he is not fit for the kingdom of God." And again—" If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." And again, speaking of faithful Christians, the Apostle says—" But we are not of such as draw back unto perdition, but of such as believe to the saving of the soul." To every individual, then, in the Christian profession, there is a caution here against going back. And I caution you to be alarmed the very moment when you begin to feel yourselves growing weary in the performance of your duties, or in exercising

the graces and virtues of the Christian life, or in mortifying those fleshly lusts which war against the soul. Beware, lest though you may maintain an observance of public duties, you should grow remiss in those which are private. Be alarmed when your delight in the Scripture languishes, and when your meditations are tedious, and you grow cold and formal. Beware when your faith and love operate with less vital energy. Beware when your besetting sins begin to regain their strength, and to resume their ascendancy. In a case like this, you are in danger the most imminent; and are likely to fall into the hands of an adversary who is constantly going about seeking whom he may devour. Your only safe course is to rouse to a sense of the danger. Look about you with an awakened interest, and when there is before you the least intimation that you may be losing the interest you have felt in eternal

and spiritual things, shake off, by an immediate effort, all the solicitations of sloth—listen to the word of God, and obey it instantly—"Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward."

In adapting this part of my subject particularly to the case of those among my readers who have lately taken on themselves the obligations of the baptismal covenant, and have assumed the greatly responsible situation of the open and avowed disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, I would with the deepest and most anxious solicitude caution them against the danger of declension in religion. It is a rock on which faith and a good conscience are more likely to be shipwrecked, because that rock at present lies more concealed from their view. I know that they are hardly willing to suppose that there is danger of their forsaking God. But it is a matter founded on the melancholy recollections o

experience, that there is always danger, so deceitful is the heart, and so alluring is the world. Let the case of Demas, mentioned by the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to Timothy, ever be in your minds. This disciple had run well for a time, and is mentioned in several places of the Apostolic Epistles with distinguished commendation; but here, in the Epistle to Timothy, we have the brief record of his defection, and its melancholy cause. “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved the present world.” To you there is incalculable danger of falling into supineness and indifference, into worldliness, then licentiousness, then backsliding, and then perhaps apostacy—the crucifying of the Son of God afresh, and putting him to an open shame. There is danger not only of thus ruining your own souls, but of giving the enemies of your Master occasion to blaspheme, and thus bringing the contempt of the un-

godly on a cause which should be as dear to you as your own souls. Should you ever decline from the seriousness and the holiness now apparent in your solemn profession, the difficulty of again arresting your attention to serious things would be almost infinitely enhanced. You will be likely to wander further and further from God, and if you should ever again—which is in the highest degree improbable—if you should ever again be renewed to repentance, it would be through paths of difficulty, and through bitterness of sorrows, of which you now have no possible conception. What I have said, then, to all professors of religion to whom this little work may come, I desire to say to you with emphasis—beware that you go not back. Take you one backward step, and your spiritual foe, like the blood-thirsty host of Egypt, will seize you, and then the captivity of sin will be your lot on earth—the wages of

sin, which is eternal death, your portion in the world to come. Your eternal welfare is jeopardized the moment you turn back. Your only safety lies in your ready and instant and unvarying obedience to the order—"Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward."

I come now to take up my

IVth. general division, and consider as a consequence from the preceding observations, that the terms of this exhortation imperatively demand advancement—"Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward."

I have said that these words are opposed to standing still in religion. But to speak more correctly, I might have said, that in religion there is no such thing as standing still. It is progression, or it is retrogradation; for if we are not advancing in the love and ser-

vice of God, we are daily and hourly the losers ; we shall at last make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, and at the bottom of the hill find ourselves outcasts from God. That religion which is a grace-implanted principle, is invariably represented as of a progressive character. I care not what may be the measure of our attainment, great or small, they must be forgotten in a comparative sense ; and the constant desire of our souls must be for more grace, more knowledge, more faith, more love, more humility, more holiness, more complete conformity to the will and the ways of God. The only religion which is worth the name of religion, which can bring peace to the soul in the hour of affliction and the day of death, and which can bear the fiery trial of the day of judgment, is a growing religion,—a religion which deepens day by day within our bosoms our exercise of repentance and

of faith, our views of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and adds in the same proportion to our perception of the grace and mercy which have rescued us from ruin ;—a religion which makes the fire of devotion burn with a purer and a brighter flame, the longer it remains on the altar of our hearts, and fixes the soul more and more closely on its God and Saviour. I am aware that through the force of temptation and the deceitfulness of the heart, there may be occasional declensions where faith and hope may not wholly be shipwrecked. I am aware that the individual may not always be able to enjoy a comfortable persuasion of his progress, even when he is actually going onward ; but notwithstanding this, we have the authority of Scripture to conclude, that where religion is genuine, it is habitually going on to perfection. Timid disciples are sometimes apt to be discouraged, when they do not appear to

make the progress they desire; but the very fact of earnest desire and effort is proof of advancement, and their case forms no real exception to the rule laid down. True religion is like a healthy plant, which will strike its roots deeper and deeper in the soil, and send its branches more highly and extensively abroad, and bring forth in its season more and more fruit, till it be removed to the paradise of God. The religion which does not grow, is like a plant at whose roots some devouring worm is carrying on his ravages. You see the deadly effects in the deteriorated quality, and in the diminished quantity of the fruits produced—by and bye even its leaves begin to wither and to drop away—the vital sap ceases to flow—and it becomes a lifeless and useless trunk, fit only for the flames. Of every professor of religion I ask that this matter be seriously considered. Oh never, never rest satisfied with any present

attainment; God tells you in mercy to your souls, as he did to his ancient people in my text—"Go forward."

In adapting this part of my subject to any who have recently professed themselves disciples of the Lord, I must in affection and fidelity guard them against the temptation of supposing, that progression is not so imperative as I have represented. To have come before the Lord, and to have avowed themselves to be his, they have considered as a bounden duty. In this they have done well, but remember that the path of religion is yet before you, and all its graces and virtues remain to be exhibited in the living and speaking influence of your lives and conversation. Will your consciences remain satisfied and at ease, because one portion of your obligation is accomplished? If this were your feeling, I would venture to say, that you were already going backward, and

were rapidly travelling towards the land of your previous captivity. I will hope and pray that you may be induced to press onward; that you may ever shudder at the danger of a retrograde movement, and never rest satisfied without that growth in grace which makes the Christian's path "as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." For your serious meditation, the words of the Lord are specially intended—"Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward." If I am asked whether there may not be a class of persons who without being actually professors of religion, may still be exhorted to move onward, I will answer, that there is one such class; I mean those who are at the present moment under deep anxiety of mind as to their eternal concerns; who are struggling with difficulties from within and from without; who have not yet heard the peace-speaking voice

of the Spirit witnessing that they are the children of God ; who have not yet laid hold on the promises, and are not yet willing to trust their all unto the hands of their compassionate Redeemer. Why do you not burst your bonds at once, and in the instant surrender of your hearts to God, break from your dismal captivity and taste the sweets of the glorious liberty of the children of God ? Though I cannot address you as having set out in the way of religion, still from the land of darkness and of captivity lift up your eyes, and catch a momentary encouragement from the exhortation, as it dies away upon the distant air—"Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward."

In the foregoing remarks, I have purposely omitted the mention of the difficulties which are in the way of progression, and my object has been to bring them all into one condensed view. On this part of my subject

we derive immense advantage from the history with which this text is connected.— Viewed without respect to the miraculous agency of God, there never was an order more singular or more impracticable than the one which was given to the Israelites. It is said that the place at which they crossed the Red Sea was twelve miles in width ; and yet while its waves were unbroken, they were commanded to move onward. But when the command went forth from God, his power was before them, and as the rod of Moses was stretched out over the sea, the sea, obedient to its Maker's command, rose a protecting wall on either side of the chosen people. You here perceive that God himself removed the obstacle to their advancement. To the way of your progress in the Christian life, there are obstacles as many and as formidable as those which obstructed the way of Israel to the land of Canaan. It

would be the height of unfaithfulness for me to say, and it would be folly unparalleled for you to suppose that the way was smooth and easy. To be a real, faithful servant of the Lord, is a matter of the most difficult accomplishment, and I do not hesitate to represent these difficulties to you under figurative expressions of the most emphatic description. There is a wilderness to pass through in which there are lions in the way; wild beasts, and poisonous creeping things; pitfalls and snares innumerable; and thousands of foes of inveterate malignancy. These are the devices of the adversary, the oppositions of ungodly men, the persecution of mistaken relatives, the temptations of the world, and the unspeakable evils of a corrupted nature. And yet in the very teeth of all this opposition, the language of the text is—"Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward;" for in the advance is the

only prospect of salvation. This is the dark side of this picture, but it is drawn with gospel fidelity. Let us look, however, on some brighter exhibitions. If there was no strength for us but our own, and if there was no agency concerned in this business but that which belonged to ourselves, we should indeed fail, and perish in the wilderness. But here let me lead you to an idea which appears to me of vital importance. Impossible as would be salvation, by our own unassisted and ill-directed efforts, yet if this is the object of our intense desires and determined pursuit, when God gives the command to go forward, he, as it were, promises to afford the necessary strength to overcome the obstacles which are in the path; and if we will but look to him for strength, and draw our supplies from the fountain of all grace, we will find that our real strength is just in proportion to our felt and acknow-

ledged weakness. And if any of you will make the difficulties of religion your excuse for not pressing forward, let me tell you that you are deceiving your souls to your eternal ruin. Look ye to the Lord, for he has never required that at your hands which he is not able and willing to give you power to perform. And to this effect is the whole analogy of Scripture instances. I remember one beautiful instance. When Christ commanded the man with the withered hand to stretch it forth, he knew and beheld the inability. The hand hung lifeless at the side of the paralytic, and to have raised it in a natural effort was impossible. Did the paralytic stop to reason about the practicability of obedience? Did he stay to speculate upon the singularity of such an order? Did he hesitate an instant to comply? No! Christ gave the command; with the command there went forth some mysterious energy, and the

man whose hand hung powerless and dead, stretched it forth at a word. I care not for all the wire-drawn speculations of minute theologians ; a fact of this kind from the Scriptures is sufficient to put to flight all mere metaphysical subtleties which might bewilder and distract the mind. God's commands are to be obeyed ; in the performance, there cannot therefore be any impossibility, and thus on his own head, if he perishes, comes the sinner's condemnation. It is well remarked, that the same all-powerful voice which calls us to go forward, commanded the deaf to hear, the blind to see, and the lame to take up his bed and walk. The exhortation of the Apostle is of similar import—"Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." The command itself will neither quicken the dead, nor arouse the sleeper, yet the power which accompanies it, is suf-

ficient for these purposes, and the Lord delights to make his strength perfect in our weakness, that the power and glory of Christ may rest upon us. He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Whatever difficulties, therefore, may obstruct your progress in the way to heaven, you must still go forward, and be pressing on to eternal life. Let nothing deter you in the pursuit, but say to every opposition, I will go in the strength of the Lord God. If this is your determination, and you are faithful, God will bear you through as on eagles' wings. The waters of the sea shall part before you, your enemies shall flee and be discomfited. "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, for the mouth of the Lord hath spo-

ken it." You cannot have an obstacle morally more formidable to you, than was the Red Sea, physically, to the Israelites; you have the same God to command all the unruly elements of opposition, as they had to command the waters; and to you his voice comes with the same authority as to them—"Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward."

Of all the transactions in which an immortal being can be engaged, there is none so important as the dedication of himself to God, and whether that dedication is outwardly manifested in adult baptism, in confirmation, or in the Lord's supper, it is alike most deeply interesting. In fact, what can there be more important, what more solemn, than to come publicly before the Lord, and take the vows of an ever-binding covenant upon us? Oh I beseech you, my friends, and especially those among you who are

young, let the solemnities of these transactions never depart from your minds. Reflect, I beseech you, upon the weighty obligations which you have so voluntarily assumed—think of your weakness, and exposure to temptation, and flee to a throne of grace for spiritual health and strength. You have given up yourselves to God in the bonds of an everlasting covenant never to be forgotten. Now—now, most emphatically, you are not your own, for you are not only like others, bought with a price, even with the precious blood of the Son of God, and therefore bound to glorify him in your bodies and in your spirits which are his, but you are his by a peculiar self-dedication, and bound to present yourselves a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to him, which is your reasonable service and your most imperative duty. You must, if you are faithful, you must cease to be conformed to this world; you must be

transformed by the renewing of your minds, that you may prove to yourselves, to the world, and to God, what is the holy, perfect and acceptable will of God. By this deed of self-dedication, you are the servants, and the peculiar property of God, and your crime will be nothing short of sacrilege, if you give either your persons or your talents to the service of his enemies ; you must belong entirely to God. By a profession of religion, if you are not hypocrites, you have become dead to the world, and crucified to the flesh, and it is a robbery of God, and a fraud on your own souls, should you devote the time which to your own souls and to God should be consecrated, to those vain and idle amusements, those gaudy and glittering trifles, and those sinful pomps and vanities, those worldly connexions and associations which all true professors of the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ do most so-

lemnly and heartily renounce. Let your faces, I beseech you, be determinately heavenward; seek more and more the influences of the Spirit; rest not till transformed more and more into the image of God, you are enabled to shine as lights in the world, and adorn by your conduct and conversation, the doctrine of God your Saviour. I trust that the solemn surrender of himself to God which an individual makes, either in baptism, in confirmation, or in the more matured profession of religion in the holy communion, has staid your choice permanently on God. I trust that these various and repeated bonds into which you have entered, have now sealed your vows to him who merits all your love. I trust that the transactions in which you have borne so conspicuous a part, have now made you his for time and for eternity. But remember, that the waves of the sea, and the frightful wilderness with all its trials

and temptations, and the Jordan of death, are all yet to be passed before it will be your lot to reach the heavenly Canaan, the land of the believer's promised inheritance. Forward—forward in the love and service of God you must go, with unhesitating and unshrinking fidelity, or never will you reach the rest which remaineth only for the people of God. In the solemn exhortation now before us, God has not only given you a command, but he has furnished you with motives and will furnish you with strength, only be ye faithful, and press forward. The wilderness is before you, but you must persevere unto the end, if you would be saved. Some of you may be called away by death before you have travelled very far on this comparatively difficult journey of the Christian life. Some of you may be permitted to travel yet many a year through the wilderness, sometimes cheered by the smiles, and sometimes

dismayed by the clouds of heaven ; yet in all, says God, fear not, I am with you ; be not dismayed, I am your God ; “ when thou walkest through the fire I will be with thee, and through the waters they shall not overflow thee.” The issues of life and death are in the hands of God, and of him alone ; and who among you may be spared, or who among you may come to an early tomb, is a matter, dark and purposely hidden among those secret things which belong alone to God. But there is one thing certain, all must die ; and when that fearful time comes, nothing will afford one moment’s satisfaction or comfort, if Christ be not at hand to be our helper, all our hope, and all our desire. Oh seek his favour, which is life ; and his loving kindness, which is better than life. Let the empire of the world be rooted from your hearts. Let God be the supreme object of your best affections : salvation, the one pa-

ramount concern of your souls. Build—as sinners ever must—build on the Lord Jesus Christ alone, as your wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and hope of salvation; and on that sure foundation raise the goodly, the consistent, the beautiful edifice of the Christian character complete in him. In the strength of the Lord, and in the power of his might, set at defiance the world in its allurements, the flesh in its suggestions, the adversary in all his open or specious attempts; strive against your own evil heart of unbelief in its continued and unhallowed battle for the mastery, for you can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth you. With your faces determinately set towards Zion, urge your way onward. The everlasting welfare of your souls depends on your fidelity to every covenanted engagement; and it is only when through the wilderness of this world you have travelled, that you will descry the land of promise free from the mists which

now obscure your vision. “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” When tempted to halt in your Christian course, think of the command—“Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward.” When in danger of backsliding, think of your inveterate foes in the rear, and of Egyptian slavery again ; and listen to the order—“Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward.” When appalled by obstacles, go to the Lord to make your way plain ; remember Israel at the sea, and let the command to them be a command to you. In all your circumstances, in all your experiences, in all your trials, in all your difficulties, hear the word of the Lord, and take courage. Onward—onward. Faith and hope are in the van, ruin and everlasting misery are in the rear. It is God who says—“Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward.”

We will now take a far more extended and comprehensive view of the subject of progression in religion, though my remarks will appear to be confined to one single point, the absolute necessity of this progression. Under this general head I hope to present you with such views as may be carried home to your hearts with a solemn and practical effect. “Speak to the children of Israel that they may go forward,” is the solemn and imperative command of God, and I argue the absolute necessity of progression in the Christian course, from the following weighty considerations :

I. Progression is a test of our sincerity.

II. It is only in progression that we can experience the present comforts of religion.

III. It is only in progression that we can hope for future uninterrupted happiness.

IV. Progression is necessary, because, let our attainments be what they may, they will

fall lamentably short of what we ought to have attained.

After having spoken on these topics, I shall, God willing, consider the glorious encouragements which are given to progression, and conclude the whole with an appeal, faithful, and close, and personal.

I. Progression in religion is a test of our sincerity.

When an individual sets out in the path of religion, if his desires are not to love and serve God, and to devote himself to God a living sacrifice, it is to be feared that he has set out under some fatal delusion. The very first step he has taken has been in a measure wrong, and he will travel on so blindly, that he will stumble and fall by the way. Love is essential to the perfection of the Christian character; and without that, whatever else we possess, we are but as sounding brass

and a tinkling cymbal. Love is the characteristic feature of the Deity, and in this every one of his children must strive to resemble him. By this mark we are made known to others as the disciples of Christ, and by this we are ourselves assured that we have passed from death unto life. A sincere profession of religion pre-supposes an ardent desire to love and serve God, and a fixed and steadfast determination to follow after an increased conformity to the holiness which our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ requires. As the path of the just is as a shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day, so the Christian profession, which has about it the marks of a godly sincerity, will be characterized by a continual growth in knowledge and in holiness. And for this plain reason, that no matter how much a person may deceive himself, he cannot truly love that which he does not earnestly desire to

attain, and after which he does not ardently and perseveringly strive. As the aim of a real Christian must in all things be to glorify God in his body and his spirit, which are God's, so he will never rest satisfied in any course which stops short of this. If we take advantage of the analogy which is afforded us by the various pursuits of literature and science, we cannot fail to be convinced that at least one test of our sincerity is the progress which we make. For no one will believe that man sincerely desirous of having the capacities of his mind enlarged, and the boundaries of his intellectual and scientific attainments extended, who sits himself quietly down with the limited advance he may already have made. It is true, that there may be intellectual and physical impediments in the way of progression in literature and science. But even if these exist, yet where the individual has become sincere-

ly desirous of advancement, they have been overcome as by some mighty effort, and many a man, both at the bar and in the pulpit, and in all the walks of literature and science, has attained to eminence, over whose earlier efforts the gloom of despondency had well nigh been cast.

But when we turn to the subject of religion, we meet quite another state of things ; here there are no physical or intellectual impediments which may hinder our progress. It is one of those internal evidences of the truth of our holy religion, which cannot be got rid of, that it adapts itself to the capacities of all. It is suitable alike to the child and the philosopher ; for while it has parts which defy the grasp of the mightiest intellect, its grand, essential, vital, saving truths, are level to the comprehension of the poorest and most unlettered child of Adam—and in those essential truths, and in the practical re-

sults which flow from those truths, one test of sincerity, in both child and philosopher, is the progress which they make. I know that there are many who call themselves Christians, who have no claim whatever, save in their own arrogant estimation, to that sacred character. I know that there are many who, with just so much of a religious impression as to make them mere speculative believers, there rest upon their oars, supposing that they may then float rapidly enough with the mere force of the current; and I know that there are many, very, very many, who are disposed to be satisfied with what is a mere cold discharge of what they think duty to God; but as to growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, it enters not within the narrow limits of their relaxed and circumscribed theology. But, my friends, be not deceived, God is not mocked—"the path of the just is as the shin-

ing light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Are you sincere in the matter of religion? Are you really desirous of the inestimable blessings which it offers? If you are, you are abounding more and more in knowledge, and in all judgment you are daily becoming more and more able to approve the things which are excellent, and are progressively filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God. Are you sincere, you will listen to the voice of God, and you will comprehend the import of the language in which that voice addresses you—"Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward." Aye—that they go forward—not that they linger satisfied with whatever poor attainments they may have made. I do not doubt the sincerity of that man, or that woman who, in deep humility of soul, seems not to make that attainment which he or she

may really desire, for the very feeling of this humility, when it is deeply entertained, is a proof of advancement by no means low or questionable. But I do, and must doubt the sincerity of that man or woman, who will one instant rest completely satisfied, while there is room to improve in holy conformity to God. "Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward," is the authoritative call of God ; and if this is not done, there is amazing danger that God, who reads the heart, will read on it the deep-marked traces of deceit and insincerity.

II. It is only in progression that we can experience the present comforts of religion.

I trust that I need not say to readers of common reflection, that it is a principle, not only of religion, but in the philosophy of the human mind, that enjoyment and advancement are coincident. An inactive, or ener-

vated state of mind is inimical to all real enjoyment. It is the stretch of thought—it is the expansion of desire—and it is the progressive accomplishment of those desires, which constitute the very essence of intellectual bliss. Indeed, the stretch after new attainments—the restless anxiety of the mind after something which is yet unknown, is one of those natural arguments which goes far to establish the presumption, at least, of the immortality of the soul—that presumption which the revelation of God settles so definitively down into a principle not susceptible of doubt. If, then, advance in knowledge is that which, in a very great degree, constitutes intellectual bliss, and if the capacity of advancement is that which serves to stimulate to unceasing effort, how sublimely does this same principle adapt itself to the infinitely more important circumstances of religion. I hesitate not to affirm, that a reli-

gion in which there is no advancement made, is not in the nature of the case, and cannot be a religion susceptible of enjoyment; and it is this simple principle, combined with other causes not appropriate to my present object to mention, which serves to account for the small measure of spiritual enjoyment which appears to be the lot of many of whom there can be little doubt but that in the main they are Christians. But they have not a very exalted idea of what their religion is capable of doing for them—they do not seem to take in the extraordinary fact, that the present enjoyment which religion affords, depends very much on the advancement which is made towards the perfection required by its Author, and their Master. Do any of you, my friends, professors of religion, do you wish to enjoy its solid comforts? Ascertain first, whether your successful effort has been made to get out from the land of Egypt and

the house of bondage. Ascertain whether you have actually found the way into the path of that true and unfeigned religion which takes its merit from the cross of the Saviour, and which takes its measure from the impulse of his grace—and then you must go forward. Let the important truth then be impressed upon your minds, that your present comfortable experience of religion depends in a great measure on your progress, and the more you advance, the more will you be sure to find your peace and joy in believing. For, though over all the path of your pilgrimage clouds may occasionally flit, and rain sometimes fall, even in torrents fall, yet there will be no cloud so dense, but that some bright beam shall be able to pierce it, and no rain so heavy, but that it shall sooner or later cease, and show you the resplendent bow of promise on the bosom of the retreating storm. If you would be happy here,

even amid the agitations of the world—if you would rise to the standard of the gospel, and seek for that tranquillity of soul, that peace which passeth understanding, why then “go forward”—grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. While you make no attainments in holiness, it is not to be expected that you should make any in happiness. By some eternal, irreversible decree of God, they seem inseparably linked together, and he who would enjoy the largest measure of spiritual blessedness, while he pursues his journey to the land of promise through this wilderness of sin, of sorrow, and of tears, must seize it as it invites him onward—“Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward.”

III. It is only in progression that we can

hope for the future happiness of the eternal world.

It has before been observed, that it is impossible for minds constituted as ours are to continue stationary. This would seem to violate a law of our being. Our minds are of so subtle and active a quality, that they are always in the advance while in a healthy and natural state—or otherwise, being in an unhealthy state, they are making a retrograde movement. If we are not aspiring after higher attainments in holiness, it is a melancholy proof of spiritual declension—it is evidence of a heart divided between God and the world, and of which the world possesses the preponderating part. If we make no progress, we must, by the very necessity of the case, fall short ; for the prize of our high calling being in the advance, to attain it, we must forget the things which are behind, and press toward the mark. Besides all this, the

measure of enjoyment which will be vouchsafed in heaven, will depend on the attainments in holiness which are made during our probationary state. And it is one of the most sublime conceptions which ever exercised the mind of man, that all happiness is progressive. If, as I most truly believe, the happiness of heaven is the enjoyment of God begun on earth, stretching out through ceaseless ages, then he who makes no constant advances here, disqualifies himself for a happiness which is, and will ever be, progressive. I know that if a man is a Christian, relying on the merits of Christ, and of a truly converted heart, and God sees fit to cut him off from the land of the living before he has had opportunity of making any great advances, he is safe, because he is in Christ, united to him by a living faith; but I also know, that while a Christian lives, he is bound to advance in holiness, and that the

measure of his future glory depends much upon it. If you, my brethren, would attain to great measures of happiness hereafter, “go forward.” The delightful fields of the earthly Canaan, were far, very far, from the spot where the Israelites were encamped, when they heard the direction of my text—“Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward ;” and they had much to travel, and much to do, before they could possibly eat the new corn, and drink the new wine of that land of promise. Much have you to do, my friends—great progress have you to make before you can reach those heavenly fields, of which the earthly Canaan was but an imperfect figure. Stand still in religion, and you are lost. Stand still, did I say ? This were now impossible with you. It is forward or backward with you all. If you would indulge even one faint hope of ever entering into glory—much more, if you would

have the very highest enjoyment of a state of glory, every year, every day, every hour of your lives, you must hear, and you must obey the command of God, which says—“Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward.”

IV. I argue the necessity of progression, because, in the case of every individual, be his spiritual attainments what they may, there is yet abundant room for improvement.

When the Apostle Paul was addressing himself to the Corinthians, in that noble chapter in which he so conclusively proves the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, he breaks out in a kind of parenthetical expression—“But some have not the knowledge of God ; I speak this to your shame.” And when we, my friends, take into serious consideration the standard of piety and holiness which is set before us in the gospel,

and then contrast with this the limited advancement which we make, it should not only fill us with fear, lest, having a promise left of entering into rest, any of us should seem to come short of it; but it should also fill us with shame and with the deepest self-abasement, that so little is accomplished where so much is required, and so much can be attained. But this is not all. Not only do we fall most lamentably short, when we compare ourselves with that exalted standard which is placed before us in the gospel; but we cannot bear the most distant comparison with those of primitive times, whose elevated piety and ardent devotedness to God was marked by continual advancement. There is apt to be a faintness, a languor in every class of our devotions and our duties, and a lassitude and a weariness in all our services, to which they of primitive times appear to have been utter strangers. St. Paul, whose

experience is so amply detailed in his history and writings, was found indeed to lament that he had not yet attained, neither was he as yet altogether perfect; but his conduct showed forth the habit and the disposition of his soul. He pressed forward through hosts of difficulties which would now appal the stoutest hearts, and he rested not even when on the borders of the promised land; he could say, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith—henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me at that day." Compared with what they ought, how little do the matters of religion actually affect our hearts, and how wretched is the progress which is made even by the most among those who call themselves Christians. When the great work of redemption by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is placed before us in all its grand pe-

cularities, how little, comparatively, does it interest or impress our hearts. Viewed under all its circumstances, how cold and negligent is our love towards him, and often how difficult is it to persuade ourselves that we have any real love to the Saviour ; and how defective must that principle be, which requires so diligent an examination, and often through sighs and tears, before it can be discovered. I do not wonder that the language of the hymn is so often, and so peculiarly appropriate to the condition of many of the professed and even real friends of the Lord Jesus :

When I turn mine eyes within,
O how dark and vain and wild,
Prone to unbelief and sin,
Can I deem myself thy child ?
Lord my God, I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought,
Do I love thee, Lord, or no,
Am I thine, or am I not ?

Where is that professor of religion to be found—no matter how long or how short the time since he gave his heart to God—where is that one to be found in whose religious character there is no room for improvement? Who is there that ought not to love the Lord with more intensity, and serve him with a purer zeal? Who is there that ought not to feel the import of the sentiment:

Saviour let me love Thee more,
If I love at all I pray,
If I have not loved before
Help me to begin to-day.

How melancholy are these considerations, and they are not alone. How faint is our gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ for the unexampled love which he has manifested to us, in pouring out his soul, even unto death, for us men and for our salvation. To us He should be inestimably precious. Our love towards him ought to rise into one continued

flame of devotion. It ought to bear us above the world, and fix our affections upon the realities of eternity. How faint are the traces of heavenly mindedness which exist in the characters of the generality of those who call themselves by the name of Christ. How little genuine humility is experienced, and how seldom are we found prostrate before the throne of all grace and goodness in the deepest humility and self-abasement for the little progress we have made, compared with that which should have been experienced. A great and evident change must take place in all the professed people of God in relation to this one matter at least; for while some continue satisfied with a dull and almost heartless religion, and while others continue satisfied with but poor and feeble and sickly measures of advancement, in the one case there is no meetness to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, and in

the other a condition very little beyond rejection. In all, let their attainments be what they may, there is room for improvement, for every fibre of corruption must be severed from our nature; every particle of pride destroyed; every thing brought into subjection to [the obedience of Christ, and a complete transformation of the soul be effected, before we can be fitted to dwell with God in glory and happiness eternal. While there is any thing yet to be attained, the language is—“Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward.”

These remarks are of course appropriate to all who are professors of religion. They bear with a peculiar emphasis on those who have lately taken on themselves the vows and obligations of the Christian covenant. To their serious meditation, particularly, are these solemn things commended.

But when I think how many there may be

among my readers, who have no claims whatever to religion, who are living upon hopes the most falsely founded, and consequently fatal, there is room for the very warmest exhortation—"Escape for your lives; flee to the mountain, lest ye be consumed." When I think how many there are who call themselves Christians, and have satisfied their consciences with a sickly profession of religion which has no animating principle, I am constrained to say—"Be not deceived. God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." But when I consider how many there are who actually appear to have left the land of Egypt, and yet who linger by the way; who take little pains to improve in their Christian graces; who have little love, little gratitude, little heavenly-mindedness, little disposition to grow in grace and knowledge, I am constrained to say—Look about you, let him

that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall; the enemy is in the rear, there is room for your improvement. God calls you in terms which you will be lost for ever if you disobey—"Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward."

I desire now, in bringing the subject to a close, to take up the glorious encouragements which are given towards progression in religion, and to make an appeal faithful, close and personal to all.

On the subject of encouragement, two points are offered to our attention :

1st. The gracious assistances which are provided; and

2d. The glorious consequences resulting from progression—"Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward."

1st. Then, as to the gracious assistances which encourage us to progression.

When I place before my readers the demands of religion ; and especially when these demands are of the kind contained in the preceding observations, setting a very elevated standard of piety, I may be misunderstood on the supposition that I ask that, the performance of which, by some inexplicable and some invincible necessity, is placed beyond the reach of men. And persons are very apt to excuse themselves against the necessity of great advancement in holiness, by the deceptive plea of the difficulty of its demands. It is unquestionably true that God requires a high order of human piety. But is there any man so impious as to avow the opinion, that God demands that, the discharge of which is impossible ? Can any man suppose that God places in his way any insuperable difficulty ? Is there any physical reason why the demands of religion may not be met ? Is there any necessary

moral impediment which may not be over-leaped? What then are the real difficulties in the way of religion, and whence come the impediments which oppose themselves to progression? Has the God of all grace and mercy hedged up your way with thorns, and filled your path with stones of stumbling, and rocks of offence? No. There is no difficulty, but the want of a disposition to be greatly and devotedly religious. I see the same features spread over the face of the present generation which the Apostle saw on the face of the generation which is past—"light is come into the world, but men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil"—and therefore the difficulties with which men first invest religion are made the ready excuse for its total neglect or a dull and lifeless pursuit. But these difficulties are all of your own creation, and besides that your eyes are shut as to the fa-

cilities which are attached to this all-important business. God does not expect, and God does not ask it of you, by your own independent and worthless efforts, to meet the demands of religion. This would be inconsistent with the purposes of his grace, and inconsistent with the revealed plans of his mercy. If by an independent effort you could accomplish this, you would have whereof to glory, and salvation would at once lose the freeness of its offer, and the freeness of its accomplishment. But while God makes the demands which I have announced, he has set before you the methods in which that demand is to be met, and leaves you without excuse when those methods are not adopted. Have I called upon you this day in the language of the leader of Israel, to “go forward?”—I have only called upon you to do that which God demands, and which God can surely enable you to per-

form. Says an Apostle, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me," and it may not be too much to assert, that in a moral point of view, there is nothing impossible to the man who puts his trust in the Lord, and stays himself upon his God. Before you make any excuse, can you answer it to your own consciences whether your dependence is upon the Lord? Do you know and feel the force of the declarations—"If any man among you lack wisdom, let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given—but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." And again: "Ask and ye shall have, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you."—"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he

will have mercy upon him, and to our God for he will abundantly pardon him." Before one excuse can be urged for a neglect of religion, and before a shadow of apology can be made for a want of progress in religion, you must be well assured that nothing hath been neglected on your part. It is here I am afraid that the generality make a fatal error. God never fails in a solitary promise which He has seen fit to make. He has promised to faith all the help which is essential to the accomplishment of his demands. Over your heads, as over the heads of the children of Israel in the wilderness, is the guiding pillar of the cloud, and if you do not chose to follow it, whose is the fault? It leads on the way to Canaan; if you prefer to linger by the way till its light and its shadow are lost, then if you perish in the wilderness, you perish because you heeded not the offered assistance, and turned a deaf

ear to the voice in which God himself addressed you, when he said, "Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward."

2d. But not only do we receive encouragement to progression, from the Divine assistances which are offered, but from the revealed consequences which result from that progression. The end of our faith, says the Apostle, is the salvation of our souls.

When the children of Israel stood a defenceless band, on the borders of the Red Sea, they had no adequate conception of the delights of the land of Canaan. It is true, they had some faint conceptions that it was a good land and a pleasant, and a land which had long been promised to the seed of Abraham. Alas ! that so few of them ever realized its joys. But they knew, that between them and Canaan rolled the angry sea, and spread out the great and terrible wilderness. Still what was to be done ? The sea must

be passed and the wilderness must be trodden, ere Canaan could be entered. Upon their progress then, in a certain sense, depended their enjoyment of the promised land; and its verdant fields, its vallies thick with corn, and its hills crowned with lofty cedars, were the inducements, under the high commands and authority of God, to persevere in their dreary and perilous wanderings. Oh, how rapturous must have been the pleasure of the tribes, when their feet once came up from the Jordan, and stood on the solid earth, the land of their long-promised, long-sighed for inheritance. They found it indeed to be a land of promise—a good land and a pleasant, a land flowing with milk and honey, a land in which they could eat bread without scarceness, and in which they lacked no manner of thing that was good. But why do I speak of the earthly Canaan, that land of promise once so blessed, once so prosperous and happy.

Judea now sits 'neath her with'ring palm
With desolation round ;
And Gilead's self can yield no balm
To heal her cureless wound.
Her hands upheld to heav'n in vain
Are compassed by the victor's chain.

And Salem's might is fall'n now,
The Temple razed and strewn,
And e'en what peace had left laid low,
Its ruins overthrown.
Her warriors slain on battle day,
Her daughters captur'd far away.

The fire is burning in her heart,
Tho' quench'd within her eye,
And tho' she weeps, those tears impart
No joys to agony.
Those tears are like the streams which flow
From tracts of lurking fire below.

She sits beneath her with'ring palm
In solitary state—
With scarce a hope to cheer, or calm
The horrors of her fate.
And He who once illum'd her path,
Hath now withdrawn his face in wrath.

I desire to call your attention, my friends, to a far better country—a country on which there can come none of these reverses.—Earthly Canaan, once so happy, was a type of the Canaan whose sweet fields are above, and to you the enjoyment of a promised bliss eternal in duration is held out as an encouragement to go forward ; for without progression in holiness, it never, never can be realized. I may not describe that celestial Canaan. All that is delightful in an earthly paradise would here be utterly inadequate. To those, who sustained through the perils of the wilderness, shall have reached that happy country, oh how rapturous will be the scene, and oh how extatic will be the experience ; and while the prospect of this is held out as an encouragement, it awaits none but those who press towards the mark. And is not the encouragement one which is competent to excite you, who have professed to have

laid hold on Christ, and devoted yourselves to him? Is it not something incalculably sublime to have the prospect, when once delivered from the ruins of the present mortal condition, and all that is painful in the present state, of entering upon a life of perfect holiness, of full and eternal bliss? Is it not stimulating in the highest degree, when that land is set before us, whose sun shall no more go down, and whose moon shall no more withdraw itself, where the Lord God is an everlasting light, and the days of mortal pilgrimage are ended? With this faith, and this prospect, and that hope which entereth in within the veil, these delights have a pleasant subsistence in the soul, and by their constraining power, the real Christian must, and he will “go forward”—for on no other terms, let it be distinctly and impressively understood, on no other terms can this bliss be realized. By all the glorious

promises of the gospel, by all the joys unspeakable and full of glory, by all those peculiar delights of whose true nature and character “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive ; by the distance which you may have yet to travel, and by the perils and enemies of the way, you are exhorted as from the very mouth of the Eternal—“Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward.” If you stumble and fall by the way, if you refuse to press onward, with a constant dependence upon God, and yet with a zeal and effort commensurate with the object, you can never realize the glories of the heavenly Canaan ; for its ceaseless and untiring delights, the full fruition of its everlasting bliss, is only for those who through faith and patience inherit the promises, and who, in the day of their probation, have with a daily accumulating vigour, and a daily increasing in-

tensity of desire, pressed towards the mark for the prize of their high calling in Christ Jesus our Lord. The word ever will be—
“Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward.”

I have now stated the necessity of progression, and have laid out before my readers the encouragements. It only remains that I endeavour to bring this whole subject to a close, by a faithful, and close, and personal appeal.

To every individual who calls himself or herself a Christian, to every professed disciple of the Lord Jesus, let me put the solemn question,—Are you obeying the command of God, which says—“Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward?” If not, what manner of excuse can you possibly offer? Every excuse which you may presume to offer, dishonours God, and condemns yourself. It dishonours God, because it as much as charges upon him the

failure ; it consequently condemns yourself, because it plainly declares that you did not believe the testimony of God ; neither did you reach out to the proffered salvation with all its abounding grace. You have not permitted the importance of religion, and the commands of God, and the glorious encouragements of the future, to make a deep and lasting impression on your hearts. And what, my friends, must be the end of all this defective view of things ? No matter though you are professors of religion, will it be with you, as with those who have pursued a different course ? Shall you ever be permitted to overtake the man who in the zeal and energy of his Christian endeavour has run with patience the race what was set before him ? No ! It is his progression in knowledge, in holiness, and in love, and in sanctified obedience, which stamp the character of the real Christian ; and where no

progress is made, there may be the Christian's counterfeit, but there will be nothing which shall stand in that day when the refiner's fire shall try the purity of every Christian profession. It is not in reference to this world, my friends, that I am much solicitous about you. But when I consider that short is the period of your probation, and that soon, in the silence of the grave, all your opportunities of improvement will be shut out, I look towards the future with fear and trembling as to the eternal results in which you will then be involved. Now is the only time in which you can grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ; for there is no knowledge, or wisdom, or device, or work in the grave whither you are going. If you would attain to glory, you must work while it is called to-day, for the night cometh when preparation and when progression will be be-

yond your reach. Are you this instant fit for heaven? Has there as yet passed upon you that great moral change than which there is none other moral fitness for a state of purity and holiness? Should the heavens now burst asunder, and the last revealed elemental fire now commence its ravages—should the trumpet now sound which is to wake the dead, and to summon them with the living to the judgment-seat of Christ, have you, my beloved brethren, professing Christians, made that progress in religion which you know is demanded, and without which you can have no qualification for the presence of that God whom you should have served? My friends, be not deceived—called as you are by the name of Christ—professedly as you are his disciples, you may fall short of the kingdom. You may be satisfied with weak and sickly efforts, and the necessity of continual progression in holiness may never

enter into your imaginations or stimulate you to powerful and unrelaxed exertion ; but then you can no more reach the heavenly Canaan, than could the snail, whose pace you emulate, compass, in his small span of life, the boundaries of this green earth. Christ hath not purchased salvation for you, and yet left you at liberty to disobey his commands ; and if your path of life is not as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day ; if you neglect that necessary growth in grace which is to bring you to the full stature of a man in Christ, you have not a solitary hope on which you may build. If God's word is true—and there is no rule of judgment but that unerring standard—if God's word is true, you are lost beyond the possibility of recovery. The calls and the opportunities of God cannot be neglected with impunity ; and if, when in the fulness of his com-

passion as well as in the majesty of his power, he calls—"Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward;" and you stop by the way, or linger, Canaan never, never, never can be yours. I leave it with you, you who have made a profession of religion. Look to it well. But if impressed by these truths, you determine, in the strength of the Lord, and in the power of his might, to press forward, to be watchful, to be persevering unto the end; then, and only then, can you hope, can you be assured, that you shall reach that rest which remaineth for the people of God, and in the land of your promised inheritance feed in green pastures, drink of its chrystal streams, and be with God while eternity endures.

I presume that it cannot have escaped the observation of my readers, that during this whole course of observations, I have had little or nothing to say to those who did not

come under the description either of professing Christians, or as under deep and serious exercise of mind. It is a fact, and a melancholy fact, that with the majority of those who have this exhortation in their view, the subject has no concern—they have not been addressed, and how could they be? Upon a subject like this, to the careless, the unconcerned, and the impenitent, I could have nothing to say. As to them, the subject sealed my lips. Could I ask you, my dear friends who are yet careless, to go forward? To go forward—where? You are now walking in the broad road which leads to the chambers of everlasting death, and to urge you to go forward would be but to urge you to accelerate your eternal ruin. Fast enough, aye, too fast, are you going already; and in relation to you, my first and most impressive duty is, that I seek to arrest you in your downward path to hell. It is here that my

duty toward you is evidently concentrated; and if I cannot succeed in this, all other efforts are absolutely wasted. 'The message which God sounds in your ears is, Up—get you out of the land of darkness and of death, in which you are sporting on the brink of the awful precipice of ruin. 'The message to your souls is—repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out. 'The message to your souls is—Flee from the wrath to come, and seek the shelter of the cross of Christ. Believe and be saved—for he that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned. Go forward? No, my friends, rather start back with horror from the position on which you already stand! Where you are, there is no possible security—the earth beneath you is crumbling, and the heavens above you are gathering thick with clouds—not one glorious ray can I discover beaming on your path. It is without

light and without hope. Go forward! My soul shudders at the possibility, at the awful probability that you *will* go forward.

“Broad is the road which leads to death,
And many walk together there.”

“Go forward!” No—the same voice which addressed its command to Moses, “Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward,” turns in infinite compassion upon you, and beseeches you, by the woes and the tears, by the agony and the bloody sweat, by the cross and passion of Him who died to redeem your souls—that voice beseeches you “to flee from the wrath to come,” and to find a hiding place from the storm, and a covert from the tempest in the free salvation of the Saviour of sinners. While you are resting on some false foundation, or while careless and unconcerned, you are madly rushing on to destruction, from these heights of Zion we can only say, “Why will ye die?” Follow-

ing out the testimony of Scripture, I ask,
with a solicitude more deep than you will be
disposed to credit—

“Sinner, O why so thoughtless grown ;
Why in such dreadful haste to die ?
Daring to leap to worlds unknown,
Heedless against thy God to fly.
Wilt thou despise eternal death,
Wag’d on by sin’s fantastic dream;
Madly attempt the infernal gate,
And force thy passage to the flame ?”

Can I urge you to go forward and be lost
for ever ? No.

“Stay sinners—on the gospel plains
Behold the love of God unfold
The glory of his dying pains—
For ever telling—yet untold.”

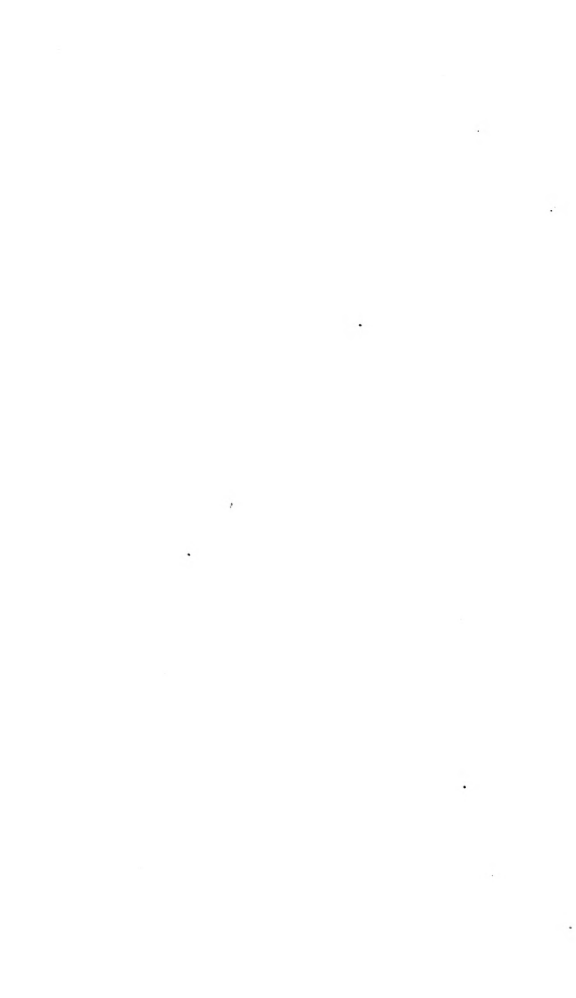
Oh that I might be the means of inducing,
if it were only one, now careless sinner, to

venture on the Lord Jesus Christ, to humble himself in the dust, and there to lay hold on eternal life. Then, while there would be joy in heaven over one sinner repenting, there would be joy among the children of God on earth. Then would there be another added to the number of those to whom, having set out on the way of religion, I could address the language of my text, and pointing you to Canaan's sweet and lovely fields beyond the swelling flood, could say, "Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward." Oh, careless sinners, why will you not permit the God of all grace and goodness to address you in the language of encouragement? Why will you force him to declare in his wrath, that ye shall not enter into his rest? I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that you no longer trifle with your souls—that you no longer slight the riches of redeeming grace. What a pang does it cost

the bosom to be compelled to leave you without one hope—yet I dare not, in faithfulness to your own souls, as well as in fidelity to God—I dare not leave with you one word of encouragement. I can hear nothing but Sinai's appalling thunder, I can see nothing but Sinai's terrific lightning. The voice which can call to the children of God "go forward," can only call on you "turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die." Jesus, your neglected, your despised, yet your still compassionate Redeemer, once more asks you to have mercy on your own souls—once more places the gospel salvation within your reach—once more pleads with you to embrace his merciful provision—once more, in agony and tears, asks you to attend to the things which make for your everlasting peace before they are for ever hidden from your eyes. What more can he do for you than he has already done? While, then, I still

say to the children of God “go forward,” I testify against the neglecters of the great salvation—Oh, Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself. And the only prayer which can come appropriately from the heart for you is, that God would snatch you as brands from the everlasting burning. Oh, what a distinction is there here on earth among the privileged hearers of the gospel! Shall this distinction go onward to eternity? My dying readers, why will ye so long hold out against the love of God? Why will ye not seize his offered mercy, and be holy and happy now and to eternity, in the full acceptance of a Saviour, and in going forward in his holy service for ever? May He mercifully bless this little book, to the good of your precious souls, for his own sake.

AMEN.





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